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WATER BELL SCHEME IN KERALA'S SCHOOLS TO KEEP KIDS HYDRATED

As temperatures begin to soar, the Kerala govt on Monday directed schools to ring the bell twice a day so as to remind students to consume water. Education minister V Sivankutty asked schools to ring the bell at 10.30 am and 2.30 pm as a remainder to students to take water. He advised students to drink water even if they did not feel thirsty. Consuming enough water is the only way to fight adverse impacts of heat, the minister said. He ordered schools to make arrangement for supply of clean drinking water

Scan for more information
Hamara Sankalp Viksit Bharat
Modi Sarkar ki Guarantee
Prosperous dairy sector
India largest producer of milk in the world, record increase of 58% in milk production in last 10 years; Welfare of 8 crore cattle-rearing families ensured

Farmers reject offer, set to resume protest

Centre had suggested guaranteed MSP regime for five crops for five years

HARPREET BAJWA @Chandigarh

FARMER leaders on Monday rejected the Centre's offer of a guaranteed minimum support price for five crops for five years, stating they wanted the mechanism to apply for all 23 crops and not a piecemeal deal.

They also announced the resumption of their 'Dilli Chalo' march from both the Shambhu and Khanauri inter-state Punjab-Haryana borders on Wednesday peacefully.

The Centre made the proposal during the fourth round of talks it had with the protesting farmers on Sunday night. The guarantees would come from three Central cooperatives — the Cotton Corporation of India (CCI), National Cooperative Consumers' Federation of India (NCCF) and National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India (NAFED) — and not from the government direct.

After the meeting, Union minister for food, commerce and consumer affairs Piyush Goyal said, "we had positive talks and have proposed a very innovative, out-of-the-box idea. The crops which the government has proposed to buy on assured MSP are *tur, urad, masoor,* cotton and maize." Apart from Goyal, ministers Arjun Munda and Nityanand Rai participated in the talks.

Farmers listen to a leader at the Punjab-Haryana Shambhu border during their 'Delhi Chalo' protest, near Patiala district on Monday | PTI

Hours later, Sarwan Singh Pandher, general secretary of the Kisan Mazdoor Sangharsh Committee and Jagjit Singh Dallewal, president of Bharatiya Kisan Union (Ekta Sidhupur) said, "We reject the proposal as it is not in the favour of farmers."

Briefing the media after the talks, Goyal said, "We have proposed that the CCI, NCCF and NAFED enter into a legal contract with farmers who grow *tur, urad, masoor,* cotton and maize for buying their crops at MSP for next five years. There will be no limit on the quantity purchased and a portal will be developed for this."

SC to examine ballot papers of Chandigarh Mayor poll today

SUCHITRA KALYAN MOHANTY

THE Supreme Court on Monday slammed Anil Masih, the returning officer (RO) of the January 30 Chandigarh mayoral polls, for "defacing ballot papers" and sought the ballots and the video recording of the counting for the court's perusal. The bench comprising Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud and Justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra said it may consider declaration of results on the basis votes already cast instead of ordering fresh polls.

The BJP won the polls after defeating the AAP-Congress alliance candidate after the RO declared eight votes of the latter as invalid. BJP's Manoj Sonkar was declared winner after polling 16 votes against 12 polled by AAP's Kuldeep Kumar. Sonkar later resigned while three AAP councillors defected to the BJP.

"We are deeply concerned about the horse-trading," the bench remarked, and fixed the matter for further hearing on Tuesday at 2 pm.

The apex court said the RO must be prosecuted for interfering in elections and directed him to be present in the court on Tuesday as well.

Masih denied the charges that he tampered with the ballots saying he only put his mark on some ballots that were already defaced so as to distinguish them from valid ones. However, the bench was not convinced by this argument.

The SC directed the registrar general of the Punjab and Haryana High Court to depute a judicial officer to bring the records safely to New Delhi and present them before it on Tuesday.

Court grills returning officer

The SC on Monday posed hard questions to Returning Officer Anil Masih, while warning him of prosecution if he resorted to falsehood. "Why were you looking into the camera and putting the 'X' mark on the ballot papers?" the court asked, adding tampering ballots can't be allowed in an electoral democracy

QUOTA GUARANTEE

House okays Bill for more govt nominees in co-ops

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

THE Legislative Assembly on Monday passed The Karnataka Co-operative Societies (amendment) Bill, 2024, to increase the government's nomination to three on boards of higher cooperative bodies, including the state's apex bank, by ensuring reservation to SC/ST communities, women and a person from the general category as directors. The number of board of directors of the apex bank, which is now 22, will go up to 25 and the government may have an upper hand in decision-making.

Some BJP legislators opposed the Bill, accusing the government of bringing the cooperative sector under its clutches. But Cooperation Minister Kyathasandra N Rajanna eventually got the bill passed promising that certain "loopholes", if any, will be rectified. BJP MLAs expressed concern over giving voting power to nominated directors in the elections.

Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister HK Patil suggested certain changes, keeping in view the long-term impact on the sector. As per the Bill, one each seat for members of either SC or ST, for women and for other categories will be reserved with an intention to ensure social justice and opportunity to the deprived and unrepresented sections of society in the cooperative movement. The sub-section (4B) of Section 28-A of Karnataka Co-operative Societies Act, 1959, provides for nomination by the state government as its representative on the board of every assisted society other than the board of the primary agricultural credit cooperative society.

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EXPRESS READ

Tata firms to invest ₹2,300 crore in state

Bengaluru: The state government on Monday entered into a memorandum of understanding with Air India and Tata Advanced Systems Limited for an investment of Rs 2,300 crore. This is likely to create about 1,650 direct and over 25,000 indirect jobs in the state | P4

THAROOR SAYS NO PLANS TO LEAVE CONGRESS

10 years of BJP rule has demonstrated that the 'grand old party' is the best alternative. In the latest edition of Delhi Dialogues, he said he was entirely with the Congress | P9

Guessing game over, Nath to stay in Cong

ANURAAG SINGH @Bhopal

ENDING speculation of whether or not Congress veteran Kamal Nath and his son Nakul would leave the party and join the BJP, Nath loyalist and former state minister Sajjan Singh Verma on Monday said both would stay in the grand old party. "Nakul Nath will contest the Lok Sabha polls as Congress candidate," Sajjan told reporters outside Kamal Nath's residence in New Delhi, adding that the veteran leader had authorised him to brief the media.

Kamal Nath on Monday had a meeting with Congress leaders from Madhya Pradesh for about an hour-and-a-half over the forthcoming Lok Sabha polls and Rahul Gandhi's *Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra*, which comes to the state on February 22, Sajjan said. After the *yatra* leaves the state, Nath will start touring the state for the Lok Sabha polls, he added.

In a related development, the Congress called a meeting of its MLAs and MPs in Bhopal to discuss the preparations for the *yatra*. Kamal Nath is likely to participate in those meetings, said Jitendra Singh, Congress general secretary in charge of Madhya Pradesh.

BJP spokesperson Narendra Saluja wrote on X, "Nath Sahab has managed to blackmail his party high command with a host of conditions, including his increased say in MP Congress, making him the party's face again in MP, include him in central party's committees."

Speculation on how the rumour began

Congress and BJP circles are trying to figure out the origin of the speculation on the wily leader's bolting from the grand old party and his quick reconciliation. The state party leadership went into panic mode over the last two days over the father-son's possible exit and switching to the BJP

No stocks of 190 essential medicines in state: Rao

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

HEALTH Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao on Monday said that the state has no stocks of 190 of the 410 essential medicines for supply to government hospitals. "We need to purchase 732 medicines and supply them to hospitals. Of them, 410 are essential medicines, and the rest are optional. We have no stocks of 190 essential medicines. That is the reality and we are not hiding anything," the minister said in the Legislative Council.

Replying to MLC HS Gopinath's question on the hardships caused to poor patients due to non-availability of essential medicines in government hospitals, the minister admitted that there are many shortcomings in the department. Steps are being taken to streamline the whole system.

He said efforts are on to supply all medicines to hospitals by the first week of April. Tenders have been invited for the purpose.

Stating that his department cannot escape from its responsibility of providing medicines to poor patients, he said directions have been issued to hospitals to purchase medicines from funds available with them. "They are purchasing medicines locally. But the process lacks transparency," he said.

CONTINUED ON: P4

RAHUL IN AMETHI

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's *Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra* in Amethi on Monday. Speculation is rife on his contesting from the Amethi Lok Sabha seat, which he lost to Smriti Irani in the 2019 elections | PTI

Can't regularise all bagair hukum land: Byre Gowda

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

REVENUE Minister **Krishna Byre Gowda** said on Monday that over 9.85 lakh applicants have sought regularisation of cultivation on 54 lakh acres of government land under the bagair hukum scheme.

"The state government cannot regularise Bagair hukum cultivation on such large tracts of land. A large number of people are trying to misuse this scheme for regularisation of government land being cultivated by them illegally," he said in the Legislative Assembly.

"The scheme is meant for the landless poor. We have formed 138 Bagair hukum regularisation committees to dispose of applications. The committees in some taluks are yet to be formed. I have asked district ministers to form committees at taluk levels soon," he said.

Byre Gowda said the verification process is on and many applications have been found to be bogus. "An individual has applied for regularisation of land being cultivated at 25 places. In some cases, false age certificates have been submitted. Applications of ineligible people will be rejected," he added.

When some MLAs stated that many eligible applications have been rejected, he said they will be re-examined. "I have instructed revenue officials not to approve the applications of ineligible people. The applications rejected due to misinterpretation of rules will be reconsidered," he said.

SC stays criminal proceedings against Siddu

SUCHITRA KALYAN MOHANTY @ New Delhi

IN a big relief to Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, the Supreme Court on Monday stayed the criminal proceedings against him and other Congress leaders for organising a protest march in Bengaluru on February 14, 2022.

A two-judge bench headed by Justice Hrishikesh Roy and comprising Justice Prashant Kumar Mishra passed the order staying the criminal proceedings against Siddaramaiah after hearing his Special Leave Petition (SLP). Dr Abhishek Manu Singhvi, senior lawyer, appearing for Siddaramaiah, said in a democracy, the right to freedom of speech and protest is paramount. P4

SEEKING SUPPORT

Young Odisha hockey international Jyoti fights to save her house

SWAROOP SWAMINATHAN @ Rourkela

ON Sunday night, after India's match against the US at the Birsa Munda Hockey Stadium in the city, Jyoti Chhetri scanned the capacity crowd for a glimpse of her parents. Once she had spotted them, she smiled. At some level, the Chhetri story couldn't be any more romantic. She was born inside the city's main sports hostel at Panposh. That hostel's meat and drink is in ensuring kids who take up a hockey stick graduate summa-cum-laude (Dilip Tirkey, Prabodh Tirkey, Lazarus Birla and, recently, Amit Rohidas to name a few). She fell in love with the game. Now, the 20-year-old, already a World Cup silver-medallist in the inaugural Hockey 5s event last month, is strutting her stuff at the Stadium that's about 10 minutes away by walk.

Chhetri's smiles, however, hides a grave problem her family faces in the immediate future: the genuine danger of being asked to vacate their home by the government. Soon after she was born in 2003, Bhim Singh, Jyoti's father, moved out of the small hostel (he was working as a watchman when his daughter was born) quarters to a vacant piece of land right outside the hostel.

On that land, he built a small dwelling for five, including his wife and three children. A few years ago, local authorities knocked on their door to inform them about an upcoming road-widening project as part of a new bridge. On Sunday morning, hours before his daughter prepared to play the US, Bhim recounted his plight to a few journalists. The family has no problems in giving up their house but they haven't been promised any alternate accommodation either even though they have informed several authorities about the current situation.

Bhim (left) and Seema, Jyoti's parents, outside the house | EXPRESS

After the match against the US, which India won 2-1 in the shootout, Jyoti was also intimate with the story. "They (government) assured me that they will do something but nothing has happened till now," she said. For his part, Jyoti's father has already turned towards God for salvation. "We will see what happens, we are at God's mercy. Wherever he takes us." P17